

Homelessness among Women

**Sr Stan, a Religious Sisters of Charity Sister, is a co-founder
of Focus Ireland.**

In the early 1980s, I conducted research on homelessness among women, because at the time, there was no emergency accommodation available for women. The general consensus was that homelessness was a male issue and that there were no homeless women in Dublin. My research highlighted the hidden homelessness of women and as a result of my stark findings, I set up Focus Point (now Focus Ireland) in 1985.

Over the years, Focus Ireland has evolved into a homeless and housing charity, and our core belief is that homelessness is fundamentally wrong. Every day we challenge homelessness and change lives. We offer support to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and,

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through Focus Housing, we offer long term secure tenancies to over 1,200 households.

Women have unique challenges when experiencing homelessness. They have often become homeless as a result of past trauma or domestic abuse. They can be at greater risk in both emergency accommodation and on the streets, and this can mean they are often not recorded in official data, as they don't always present to emergency services. However, over the last decade, we have seen the emergence of a family homeless crisis, with women and their children at the forefront.

Since the publication of the monthly homeless reports, we have seen a massive increase in family homelessness. When the reports were first published in 2014, there were 32 families becoming homeless each month. Sadly, in 2023, this number has quadrupled, and there are now 32 families becoming homeless each week. In November 2023, for the first time ever, there were over 4,000 children in emergency accommodation.

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child. By the end of last year, there were 2,000 families in this situation, and the majority of these families were lone parent families headed by women. Mothers and their children are often placed in emergency accommodation away from a child's school and their social supports. Mothers can spend their days traveling across the city to bring their children to school and their nights alone in quiet, dark bedrooms, afraid to disturb a sleeping child. In many cases, they can't cook a meal for their child or watch their child play outside with friends. They are not allowed visitors, so loneliness, exhaustion and despair permeate their existence. The practicalities of caring alone for a child means trying to exit homelessness through finding a new home to rent is almost impossible. Focus Ireland supports these mothers with keyworkers; we know the barriers are real, but we

must continue to have hope.

After years of low production, we are now finally seeing social housing units being built. The government has signed the Lisbon Treaty, which commits to ending homelessness by 2030. People in emergency accommodation are at the acute end of the housing crisis, and like any triage system, those in most need must be prioritised. If we are serious about ending homelessness, we need to ensure there is a fair allocation of social housing units and strong robust preventative measures in place to stop families and individuals entering homelessness. Focus Ireland has called for a taskforce to identify and resolve the causes of the disproportionate rate of homelessness among lone parent families. I believe that if we can offer greater supports to these mothers, they will be able to protect and nurture their children.